

# Cuyahoga Valley

National Park Service

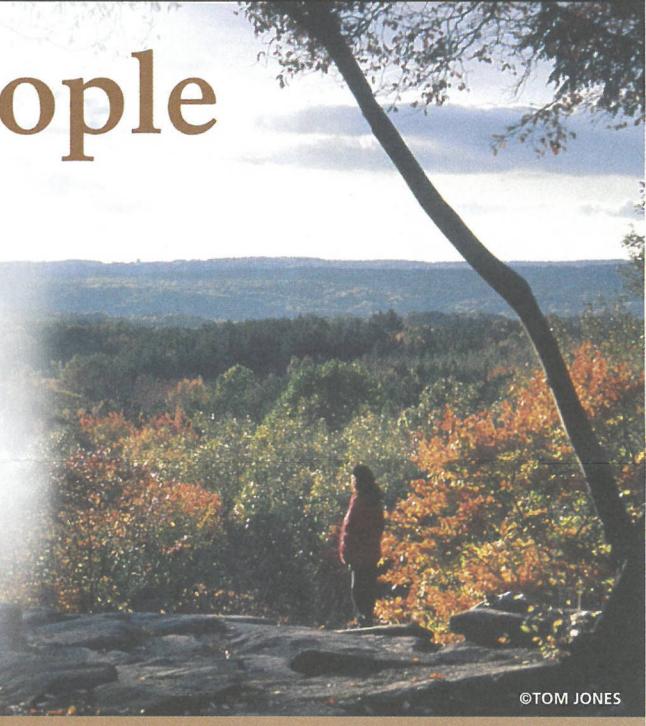
U.S. Department of the Interior

Cuyahoga Valley National Park



# A Park for All People

The story of Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP)'s establishment highlights the impact local citizens and political leaders can have when they work together with passion and common purpose to protect aspects of America's heritage. This story is rooted in the environmental and social movements of the 20th century. It is about the desire to have scenic open spaces near to home, especially for recreation. It is about not only saving significant features but restoring a landscape to be culturally vibrant, less polluted, a better home for wildlife, and a model for sustainable living.

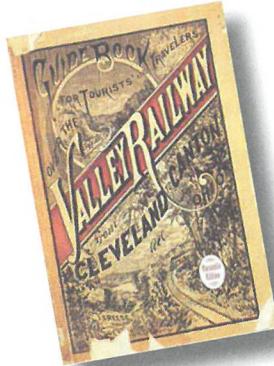


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## A Retreat From Urban Life



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The valley's role in providing recreation for urban dwellers has its roots in the 1870s, when people came from nearby cities for carriage rides or leisure boat trips along the canal. In 1880, the Valley Railway became another way to escape the pressures of urban

industrial life, and leisure excursions were supplemented by the *Guide Book for the Tourist and Traveler over the Valley Railway!*

Actual park development began in the 1910s and 1920s with the establishment of Cleveland and Akron metropolitan park districts. In 1925, the famous Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm prepared a study for Akron and Summit County parks that highlighted the recreational potential of the Cuyahoga Valley. It notes that, "it is in the valley that one can realize most effectively a sense of isolation and freedom from the sights and sounds of all the multitude of circumstances which go to make the modern city—and

when all is said and done that is the justifying purpose of a country park." Several valley metro parks date to the 1920s.

In 1929 the estate of Cleveland businessman Hayward Kendall donated 430 acres around the Richie Ledges and a trust fund to the state of Ohio. Kendall's will stipulated that the "property shall be perpetually used for park purposes." It became Virginia Kendall Park, in honor of his mother. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps built much of the park's infrastructure including what are now Happy Days Lodge and the shelters at Octagon, Ledges, and Kendall Lake.

In subsequent decades, private recreational venues such as ski resorts, golf courses, scout camps, and Blossom Music Center opened.

Happy Days construction.  
NPS COLLECTION

## Park Idea Meets NPS Resistance



Park advocates objected to the construction of the Richfield Coliseum. NPS COLLECTION

Although regional parks safeguarded certain places, by the 1960s local citizens feared that urban sprawl would overwhelm the Cuyahoga Valley's quiet beauty. Early efforts to slow development focused on fighting individual projects and rarely met with success.

Active citizens joined forces with state and national government staff to explore options for a long-term solution. Eventually local leaders concluded that the valley should become a National Park

Service (NPS) site. A precedent was set by the NPS in 1972 when urban national recreation areas were established in New York City and San Francisco as part of President Nixon's "Parks to the People" policy. However, the NPS and Department of the Interior leadership resisted costly "park barrel" initiatives that diverted funds from western "crown jewels" such as Yellowstone. In 1973, the NPS director declared, "I will tell you one thing. (The Cuyahoga Valley) will be a park over my dead body!"

## Local Citizens Rally



Advocates lead bus tour during hearings.  
NPS COLLECTION

One of the first private organizations to call for a Cuyahoga Valley park was the Lake Erie Watershed Conservation Foundation. Executive Director George Watkins felt that if valley land development continued unchecked, soil erosion and flooding would worsen and wash more pollution down the Cuyahoga River into Lake Erie.

Watkins began to work closely with another politically minded individual, John F. Seiberling, who had grown up near the valley at Stan Hywet Hall. Seiberling was then chairman of the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission and later a U.S. Congressman.

A failed bill in 1971 proved that Congress needed to see strong public support before a bill would pass. Seiberling played an instrumental role in rallying local citizens groups. A key advocate was the Cuyahoga Valley Association (CVA), founded in 1964 as Peninsula Valley Heritage Association and a forerunner

of the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Along with the Cuyahoga Valley Park Federation, CVA generated the crucial support that pushed park legislation through Congress. Seiberling, freshman Congressman Ralph Regula from Navarre, former Republican National Committee Chairman Ray Bliss from Akron, and other Ohio leaders encouraged a reluctant President Gerald Ford to sign the bill. Ford, on a holiday ski vacation, did so on December 27, 1974, establishing Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (CVNRA).



Congressmen Regula (left) and Seiberling (center) at CVNRA hearings.  
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## Building the Parts



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The law that established the national park did so in name only. The hard work of building it remained ahead. Over the next 34 years, Congressman Regula championed the park in the House of Representatives. He helped guide over \$200 million to the park to purchase land, restore nearly 100 historic structures, and establish activities for the public's enjoyment.

Starting in the mid-1980s, the NPS rehabilitated many prominent park facilities:

NPS Headquarters (1986), Canal Visitor Center (1989), Towpath Trail (1993), Hines Hill Conference Center (1993), Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center (1994), Frazee House (1995), Boston Store Visitor Center (1996), CVNPA Headquarters (2004), and numerous Countryside Initiative farms (starting in 2002).

In 2000, Regula shepherded the park's name change to Cuyahoga Valley National Park, making it more recognizable as a unit of the National Park System.

## Realizing the Vision



Canal in Akron.  
NPS COLLECTION

At the 1974 hearings, Congressman Regula said, "...we could be the architects in preserving this heritage for future generations, it goes far beyond today in terms of the potential." This has proved true. In 1996 Regula sponsored legislation to create the Ohio & Erie Canalway, a 110-mile national heritage area from Cleveland to New Philadelphia that extends the Towpath Trail and Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad. The Canalway physically connects CVNP to local parks and 40 communities.

Today CVNP is recognized for its innovative management style, culture of partnerships, and public engagement. Key operating partners such as the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, and Countryside Conservancy help the park provide important visitor services, preserve resources, and raise funds. In addition, more than 5,900 volunteers donate over 202,000 hours to realize the park's mission.